

MUSIC AND SUCCESS

TO THE EDITOR:

In his debate with Aaron Copland on modern music in your issue of March 13, Henry Pleasants relies heavily upon two misconceptions to justify his thesis. The first is that serious music was, in the past, of interest to the people in general; the second, that if serious music were regarded today (by the people) as being vital it would be financially successful, as it was in the past.

[In his article, "Modern Music: 'A Dead Art,'" Mr. Pleasants contended that serious music had run onto sterile ground and that today only jazz could qualify as vital and creative. Mr. Copland, in his article, "Modern Music: 'Fresh and Different,'" maintained that contemporary music was exploring new realms and yet remained an expression of basic human emotions.—Editor.]

In the past, say until 1900, the popular appeal of music was severely limited by the relative ignorance of the people and by the absence of mass communication to make it available to most people. It is, consequently, meaningless to speak of the popular appeal of serious music in the past.

As to serious music being financially rewarding: It often was, but only because it was supported by wealthy patrons. Beethoven had his patrons. Berlioz supported himself by his literary efforts. Wagner was successful because of his drama, not his music (but he, too, had his patron in King Ludwig of Bavaria). Very few eighteenth and nineteenth century composers could be regarded as wealthy men; Schubert and Mozart died in poverty. It is probably safe to say that more people have heard and liked Shostakovich (whose patron is the state) in the last five years than heard Beethoven in the whole of his lifetime. B. S. BURTON JR.
Durham, N. C.

'COMPULSORY' MUSIC

TO THE EDITOR:

As a concert-goer, I should like to lead a cheering section for the criticism Henry Pleasants expresses on modern music.

"That it (contemporary music) survives at all," Mr. Pleasants writes, "at least continues to be played, is due simply to the fact that the public no longer has anything to say about it."

I heartily agree with that observation. I think a question

of cultural freedom is involved when concert audiences are obliged to listen to the dreary and noisy outpourings of Menin, Roy Harris, Berg, Honegger, Hindemith and the later Bartok and Stravinsky as the price of hearing the masterpieces of Beethoven and Brahms and Wagner and Tchaikovsky. This is a kind of compulsory indoctrination (to which many besides myself are bitterly resistant) which has no parallel in any other art.

One doesn't have to read "The Naked and The Dead" as a condition of enjoying Tolstoy's "War and Peace." Nor is there any requirement that one must study the efforts of Salvadore Dali as the price of being able to enjoy the paintings of Rubens, Rembrandt and Michelangelo.

Would it not be fair and reasonable that modern compositions of the cacophonous type should be played, if they must be played, in separate programs, not mixed up with classical compositions from which they are profoundly different in style and content?

WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN.

Cambridge, Mass.

UNIQUE JAZZ

TO THE EDITOR:

Obviously Mr. Pleasants is an enthusiastic lover of jazz. But I cannot go along with him when he calls jazz "modern music." That American jazz is a unique form of our tonal art, indigenous to the United States, and an "important phenomenon of musical evolution," with a style of its own, does not in any way take away the significance of what the composers of our century are doing toward "the expression of basic human emotions,"

BERNARD KIRSBAUM.
New York.

BORROWED JAZZ

TO THE EDITOR:

Henry Pleasants' arrogant nonsense about jazz being the music of the future is not going to win over the friends its champions so desperately hunger for. When you reflect on how extensively contemporary jazz has borrowed (without acknowledging it) from the hard-won innovations of men whom Mr. Pleasants so glibly pictures as "pathetic," you can see its limitations.

As to Mr. Pleasants' contention that modern jazz has an audience and that modern serious music does not—this is even sillier than the rest of his argument. Doesn't he know that a large percentage of the jazz audience consists of people primarily interested in modern serious music who listen to jazz because it sounds more and more like modern serious music?

RAY ELLSWORTH.
New York.

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